Inversion and question tags
Adapted from "First Certificate Language Practice" by Michael Vince

Explanations

Inversion after negative adverbs   In formal speech and writing there is a special construction when the sentence begins with a negative adverb (or one with negative meaning). The subject and the verb are inverted from the normal form to a question form. Study the examples below.

- **Not only**

  *Harry **not only missed** the train, but also lost his case.* (normal form)

  ***Not only did** Harry **miss** the train, but (he) also lost his case.* (inversion)

- **No sooner**

  With *no sooner* the main verb is always in the past perfect.

  *Tim **had no sooner left,** than the phone rang.* (normal form)

  ***No sooner had** Tim **left,** than the phone rang.* (inversion)

- **Under no circumstances**

  *You **shouldn't** touch these wires **under any circumstances.*** (normal form)

  ***Under no circumstances should** you touch these wires.* (inversion)

- **Seldom**

  ***I have seldom watched** a better match.* (normal form)
  ***Seldom have I watched** a better match.* (inversion)

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- Other expressions which are followed by an inversion are:

little, never, not once, only then, only after, rarely

Inversion to With some expressions we can begin the sentence with an adverb and then put the verb before the subject.

emphasize an the verb before the subject.

- With *come* and *go* we can start the sentence with an adverb of place. This construction is used with exclamations. It is an informal usage.

Here comes *Jack!*   **There goes** *my money!*
Up went *the plane into the clouds!* **Along the road came Jim.**

- With *live* and *stand* we can start the sentence with an adverb of place. This is a formal usage.

In this house lived *Charles Dickens.*
On a hill outside the town stands *the castle.*

- With *be* we can begin the sentence with *now.*

Now is *the best time to visit the Channel Islands.*

Question tags
- Sometimes a simple statement is too short and does not help the conversation to develop in a friendly way.

You're French.

The other person does not know what to say. We can add a tag to the end of the statement so that it becomes a question.

You're French, aren't you?

Now the other person knows that they have to reply and the conversation can continue.

If the intonation of the tag rises it is a genuine question. The other person will probably continue the conversation.

    A: *You're French, aren't you? (   )*

    B: *Yes, that's right. I was born in a town in the north of France although now I live ...*

If the intonation falls, it is just checking information. The first speaker will probably continue.

    A: *You're French, aren't you? (   )*

    B: *Yes, that's right.*

    A: *I thought you were. Have you met Pierre? He's from France as well.*

- Tags are formed using auxiliaries *(do, be, have* or a modal*)*.

    *Helen **lives** here, **doesn't** she?*

    *You **left** early, **didn't** you?*

    *Jack was born in Italy, **wasn't** he?*

    *You **will** help me, **won't** you?*

    *Someone's got to pay, **haven't** they?*

- A positive statement has a negative tag, and expects the answer *Yes.*

    A: *You **agree** with me, **don't** you?*

    B: *Yes, I do.*

A negative statement has a positive tag, and expects the answer *No.*

    A: *You **don't** take sugar, **do** you?*

    B: *No, I don't.*

It is possible for a positive tag to follow a positive statement, to express interest, or ask for confirmation. This is less common.

    So you like** working here, **do you?

Tags with *will* and *won't* can be used after imperatives.

    *Don't drive too fast, **will you?***

- *Let's ...* has a tag formed with *shall.*

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*Let's have a drink, **shall we?***

1 In formal speech and writing it is possible to use inversion after negative adverbs. The adverb has to be at the beginning of the sentence or clause.

2 Intonation carries important meaning in question tags. Rising tags are questions, falling tags are checking information.

Your name's Pauline, isn't it?   (question)

Your name's Pauline, isn't it?   (checking)

3 Inversion with *come* and *go* is informal.
   Look out, here comes the teacher!